

# Ex-'New York Post' editor sues tabloid, alleging sexual harassment by Murdoch favorite

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 [npr.org/2022/01/18/1073807157/new-york-post-sexual-harassment-lawsuit](https://www.npr.org/2022/01/18/1073807157/new-york-post-sexual-harassment-lawsuit)

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David Folkenflik

The recently departed digital editor in chief of *The New York Post* alleges she was fired from the tabloid after disclosing to her new boss that she had been sexually propositioned and repeatedly harassed by a top editor. She says she suffered years of retaliation after reporting Col Allan, a longtime favorite of *Post* owner Rupert Murdoch, for harassment.

In a federal lawsuit filed Tuesday morning, Michelle Gottself alleges that the tabloid's corporate owner, News Corp, forced Col Allan out of his job as editor in chief in early 2016 after she reported that he had sexually propositioned her after years of sexual harassment. His departure was announced as a retirement and his career celebrated by staff. But Allan returned as a consultant to the *Post* in 2019 and stayed through early last year, helping to run the paper.

The *Post's* current editor, Kevin Poole is among the defendants named in the lawsuit. Gottself alleges he was mentored by Allan and that Poole started asking probing questions about what transpired between the two. Last November, Gottself alleges, she informed Poole that Allan had harassed and sexually propositioned her. Her lawsuit links that disclosure to her firing last week.

The *Post* and News Corp jointly issued a statement through a spokeswoman that, notably, did not deny or even address the question of harassment. It read, in full: "Any suggestion of wrongdoing related to the management changes announced today is meritless." Poole emailed the paper's staff Tuesday morning, shortly after the lawsuit was filed, announcing Gottself's departure, thanking her for her two decades of service, and naming new senior editors.

Before becoming editor in chief of the *New York Post* in 2001, Allan had been an editor at Murdoch's Sydney newspapers. The media magnate appreciated his fellow native Australian's roguish streak. The lawsuit alleges that once Allan returned to the *Post* as a consultant, he effectively ran it. Gottself says, for example, that as former President Donald Trump was campaigning for re-election in 2020, Allan ordered that she "get rid of" a story on [E. Jean Carroll's rape allegations](#) against Trump. Murdoch had thrown the [support](#) of most of his media properties behind Trump.

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**Murdoch favorite has faced allegations of sexual harassment before**

Gotthelf's lead attorney, Douglas Wigdor, had sued Allan and the *Post* in 2009 for sexual harassment on behalf of a different client, Sandra Guzman. She had alleged that Allan had rubbed up against female colleagues, showed her and several female peers photos of male celebrities' genitalia and demeaned her ethnicity. (Guzman is Black and of Puerto Rican descent.) She said she was fired for objecting to the publication of a cartoon about President Barack Obama that was widely protested as racist. News Corp denied the allegation of sexual harassment, but settled when the judge declined to dismiss the case against the tabloid before it went to trial.

The recent allegations also revive memories of the most severe crisis to confront Murdoch's vast media empire in the U.S.: the sexual harassment scandal that erupted in 2016 and ultimately cost the careers of Fox News Chairman Roger Ailes, star host Bill O'Reilly and many others at the network. Ailes and O'Reilly had stayed with the network for years, despite the payment of millions of dollars to accusers to keep quiet about their allegations.

The Murdoch family promised sweeping cultural changes at Fox News, part of Fox Corp, which is technically operated separately from its News Corp publishing company although Murdoch's elder son Lachlan helps lead both.

Yet just three years later, the Murdoch family recalled Allan from Australia, where he had been working for the family's media properties, despite being aware of Guzman's previous allegations, and, according to the lawsuit, aware of Gotthelf's allegations as well.

"This continues a trend of Rupert Murdoch entities appointing people whom they know to be sexual harassers, including Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly," Wigdor tells NPR. "By bringing Col Allan back after a credible sexual harassment allegation, it demonstrates their hubris."

Allan could not be reached for comment.

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